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BATHROOM TRANSFORMATION: FROM HYGIENE TO WELL-BEING?

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ABSTRACT Western bathroom standards, which have long been dominated by ideas of hygiene, seem to be in the process of change. Whereas transformations of kitchens have been well studied, little attention has been directed towards the contemporary development of bathrooms. This article provides a case study of the transformation in design, use, and meaning of Danish bathrooms, drawing lines back in history but focusing mainly on current changes. The bathroom is seen as a complex arena where many different forces interact. The study applies the regime concept to organize the story and outlines the developments in physical frameworks, practices, and images. It is based on a combination of literature survey, review of magazine and media coverage, visits to exhibitions, and qualitative interviews. The article outlines changes in

Danish bathrooms and analyzes how new trends appear in relation to actual bathroom renovations. In particular, the notion of well-being is highlighted as challenging existing hygiene ideas.

KEYWORDS: bathroom, normalization, sustainability, transition, everyday life, social practices, regime

INTRODUCTION



Over time, the arrangement and furnishing of homes co-develop with broader social and cultural changes.

This co-development has been studied within a variety of disciplines, ranging from cultural studies and history to consumption sociology and technology studies. The present article belongs to a subgroup within these studies, which concentrates on the development of particular rooms in the home. While several studies have followed the transformation of the status and role of kitchens over time (e.g. Cieraad 2002; Hand and Shove 2004, 2005; Lupton and Miller 1992; Silva 2000), bathrooms seem to have attracted less attention. Historical aspects of the transformation of bathrooms have been highlighted by Lupton and Miller (1992) and Shove (2003), but the more contemporary development has not been emphasized. With the intention to fill this knowledge gap, this article provides an account of the development in design, use, and meaning of Danish bathrooms. We draw lines back in history, but the main focus is on present changes.

The study has been motivated by the observation that a process of transformation seems to be taking place in bathrooms, particularly in the Danish case from the mid-1990s. The development of Western bathrooms has been highly influenced by the idea of hygiene, and relatively uniform material arrangements and practices have been established for this room. However, the traditional idea of the bathroom has been challenged over time, and at present the transformation process seems to be intensifying. One indication is the increased media coverage and commercial images emphasizing the bathroom as an oasis or as a sensual room, where people can withdraw, relax and pamper themselves (*Bo Bedre* 1996: 57–97; *Boligmagasinet* 2003: 34–9). Another indication is the increasing number of bathroom renovations. A recent Danish market analysis reports a growth in home improvement investments of 26 percent in real terms from 1993/5 to 2000/2, and emphasizes that kitchen and bathroom renovations represent a relatively large share of these home improvements, with bathrooms gaining increasing importance (IFKA 2005: 13–14). With a long period of economic conditions that are good for renovation activities, Denmark is an obvious place to study the current changes in bathrooms. However,

the focus on bathrooms is not an isolated Danish phenomenon; similar indications can be observed in other Western countries such as the United States and Britain, where bathrooms continue to be big business (Shove 2003: 95).

The study is based on empirical data regarding transformations in Danish bathrooms that were gathered by using a combination of methods. The main primary data originate from six semi-structured qualitative interviews aimed at investigating how Danes renovate, arrange, and use their bathrooms. The informants were chosen in order to represent a variety of life and bathroom styles among the middle-class population. This data is supplemented by a review of the oldest Danish magazine covering interior decoration (started in 1961 and still an important contributor), called *Bo Bedre* (*Live Better*). This material provides insight into changing ways of perceiving, arranging, and furnishing bathrooms. Our sample of this monthly magazine includes two years per decade from 1961 to 2002, with a collection of articles and advertisements about bathrooms. Furthermore, general observations have been made on the current coverage of bathrooms in various media (magazines, newspapers, radio, and television), exhibitions, and shops. The primary data is substantiated by statistical material and the literature about the development of Danish bathrooms, whenever such sources have been available.

The outline of the article is as follows. First, theoretical ideas related to the study of rooms are presented, including the concept of regime, which is applied as an organizing device for telling the story of bathrooms. Second, we briefly summarize the introduction of the modern bathroom and argue that a hygienic bathroom regime can be identified. Third, the implementation of the hygienic bathroom in Denmark is outlined. Fourth, current ways of using and arranging bathrooms are analyzed on the basis of three specific bathroom renovation projects. In conclusion, the extent to which the hygiene regime is destabilized is discussed, and whether the contours of a new regime are emerging.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A ROOM OVER TIME

The development of the design, use, and meaning of ordinary houses and rooms reflects a complex interaction between material, social, and cultural factors and circumstances. The house and its rooms are not only instruments of practical utility, but also places with economic, social, aesthetic, cosmological, and symbolic aspects (Gullestad 1992: Chapter 3). According to Bourdieu (1977[1972]), the house can be seen as a microcosm of important cognitive categories in a culture, reflecting what is assumed to be good and bad, male and female, private and public, etc. Such cultural categories are embodied in the house in the arrangement of walls, doors, divisions, and objects, and they can be studied through the social practices involved in the use of the house and the objects. Seen in

a dynamic perspective, this implies that social and cultural changes co-evolve with changes in the house, e.g. transformations in the patterns of work and leisure are reflected in the arrangement and use of the house.

The individual room also co-develops with social and cultural transformation. Studies on the development of the kitchen, in particular, illustrate how a room can be seen as a complex arena for the interaction of many different forces over time, and currently as a meeting place for different topical trends (Cieraad 2002; Cowan 1983; Hand and Shove 2004). Some studies suggest that the historical development of kitchens can be described as a succession of different “regimes.” The regime concept refers to the idea that a kind of coherent whole emerges—a meso-level framework that is dominant in a given period and has implications for which practices and objects can enter the room and which stylistic features are allowed. Hand and Shove (2004: 239) explore the idea that “the kitchen” can be seen as “an orchestrating concept, that is, as a kind of ‘force field’ that repels and holds particular sets of images, materials, and forms of competence together and that is sustained by them.” “The kitchen” as an orchestrating concept constitutes a meta-level vision of what the room “is” and “is for,” and the relative stability of such a vision, once established, implies that the development of the kitchen should not only be viewed as the outcome of various external tendencies and pressures.

The idea of regimes represents an inspiring and useful organizing device for telling the story of the development of a room over time. We modify the approach of Hand and Shove slightly and suggest that a regime for a room can be seen as constituted by three elements (or aspects): material arrangements and technologies, including the physical layout of the room, the social practices taking place in the room, and the images and meanings associated with the room and the related practices. To constitute a regime, these elements have to form a relatively coherent whole—they have to “fit together.”

The idea of the emergence of a meso-level framework arises from an evolutionary perspective that emphasizes how emergent structures impose limitations on micro-level processes. In this case, when a regime has been established, it orchestrates the inclusion and exclusion of practices and objects. In accordance with an evolutionary account (also inspired by transition theories, e.g. Geels 2005), this orchestration implies that a regime has a certain inertia and can maintain its basic features for a relatively long period. However, since many different forces influence the constituting elements of the regime—shaping new infrastructure and buildings and changing social practices and images of the room—sooner or later the established regime tends to be undermined and the contours of a new regime may emerge.

The application of the regime concept implies that the account is dominated by the development over time. Of course, many varieties of bathrooms coexist in a given period of time, for instance, because of social distinctions (as Southerton 2001 has demonstrated, Bourdieu's description of social distinction still makes good sense when applied to British kitchens). In spite of social and individual differentiation, the regime perspective suggests that there will be some core characteristics of the meso-level framework that are typical in a given period of time in a given society, whereas the social distinctions can constitute an important part of the dynamics that are changing the regime over time.

Whereas Hand and Shove (2004) identify three kitchen regimes in Britain during a period of eighty years, only one regime is identified for bathrooms: the hygienic bathroom. This regime was established by the end of the nineteenth century, but it took a long time to implement it in the major part of the housing stock; in the meantime, the first signs of the undermining of the regime emerged. In the following, these processes are briefly outlined to provide a background for the study of the present bathroom renovations, which not only contribute to further undermining the regime of the hygienic bathroom, but also indicate that a new regime may be emerging. In outlining the story of bathrooms, emphasis is put on the three aspects of a regime—the material arrangements, the social practices, and the images—while considering whether they can be said to “fit together” and how they change over time, reflecting various social, economic, and cultural changes.

THE REGIME OF THE HYGIENIC BATHROOM

The modern bathroom was established in close connection with the emergence of plumbing. In the pre-plumbing era, most households carried out the sparse cleansing activities using such portable appliances as the washstand and the sitz bath, which were often used in the bedroom or the kitchen where water and heat were available. Defecation took place in privies and chamber pots. Once pipes for water supply and waste disposal were installed, these portable appliances developed into fixtures—toilet, sink, and bathtub—in a specific room (Ogle 1996: 62). The bathroom was thus established as a *physical framework* for washing the body and managing human excrement. In Denmark, piped sewage systems and the first connected toilets were established in Copenhagen in the late nineteenth century and expanded to other regions in the following decades (see Lindegaard 2008).

The early plumbed bathrooms were decorated like other domestic spaces, equipped with carpets, wallpaper and curtains, and the plumbing fixtures were boxed or encased. The shift towards a hygienic appearance of the bathroom was part of a Western transition in personal hygiene (Geels 2005: 370). In Denmark, this

sanitary reform was launched in the mid-1800s, following a period of heavy urbanization and increasing public health problems due to the filth in the cities (Lindegaard 2001). The reform engaged health personnel, engineers, and city planners in the task of cleaning up the city, and hygienic ideals were preached to the masses as new behavioral norms, fostering new moral attitudes towards cleanliness (Quitzeau 2007: 355). The reform was first motivated by the so-called miasma theory, but in the 1880s, the germ theory explained the relationship between bacteria and disease and became yet another rationale in the hygiene discourse, reinforcing the battle against dirt (Corbin 1986: 223; Hoy 1995; Schmidt and Kristensen 1986: 41, 55). The reform contributed to establishing new ideals for eliminating the body's biological waste, and *practices* changed. People became accustomed to washing themselves much more frequently than before, to being more careful about how they got rid of human urine and feces, and to cleaning their homes more regularly. The "need" for the bathroom was thus established simultaneously with the physical preconditions.

The ideal of hygiene was decisive for the form and image of the modern bathroom. The hygiene ideal called for the establishment of a laboratory for administering bodily care and eliminating biological waste. Contemporary literature in the early twentieth century compared the bathroom to a hospital, characterized by a hospital's cleanliness and industrial equipment. As summarized by Lupton and Miller (1992: 3): "the 'modern' bathroom emerged at the turn of the century as an overtly industrial ensemble of porcelain-enamelled equipment, with white, washable surfaces that reflected contemporary theories of hygiene." The bathroom became a room of "duty," where concerns for comfort were disregarded: "Hygiene, rather than bodily comfort, determined the evolution of the 'bathroom' aesthetic" (Lupton and Miller 1992: 26). The room was often small, because plumbing was installed in already existing houses, where small bedrooms or other available spaces were converted into bathrooms. This set the standard for years to come.

To summarize, the *regime* of the hygienic bathroom was constituted by morally and scientifically motivated cleansing practices and the need to eliminate biological waste. These functions took place in a relatively small, dedicated room with a hospital-white image, as illustrated in Figure 1. The room received the status of a back room, where cleanliness and duty had priority over comfort.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HYGIENIC BATHROOM

The actual *embedding* of the modern hygienic bathroom occurred over a long period, since existing housings had not been constructed with such a room in mind. In the first half of the twentieth century, the hygienic bathroom was implemented in *new buildings* in Denmark, at least in the cities (in the countryside, new houses were still being



Figure 1
An example of a typical hygienic bathroom from a flat in the Copenhagen area, built in the 1950s. Photograph by the authors.

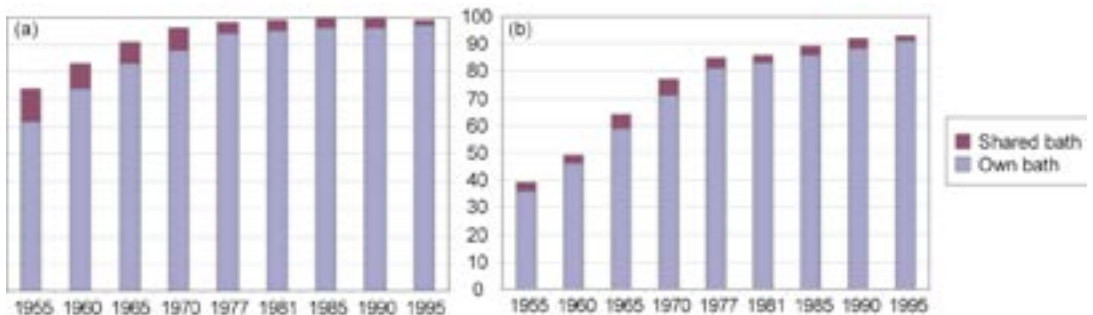
built without bathrooms in the 1920s). Toilets were also installed in existing housing, but sometimes as a shared facility. In 1955, 62 percent of dwellings had their own toilet, and 12 percent had access to a shared one (Bonke 1997: 278). In terms of bathing facilities, only 36 percent of dwellings had a bath or shower, and 3 percent had access to a shared one. In the following years, nearly all dwellings were provided with a toilet and most dwellings with a bath, as the development gathered momentum, as shown in Figure 2. Implementation of the modern bathroom in almost all housing took nearly a century.

The early prototype of the hygienic bathroom that was installed in new buildings included a bathtub. But in apartment blocks from the 1930s and the decades that followed, it became common to install showers or sitz baths instead of bathtubs in order to save space—a trend that intensified the bathroom's small back room character. In the 1960s, new apartment blocks continued to have small bathrooms, partly because of the need to prioritize space carefully, and partly because of the building industry's interest in introducing ready-made bathrooms, manufactured as modules (Bo Bedre 1970a: 85). This mode of production minimized costs and facilitated an efficient production process. Because of such strategies, the building industry was blamed by interior designers for giving priority to production demands rather than taking consumers' interests into consideration (Brøndsted 1969: 8).

The 1960s and 1970s, however, were marked by a boom in newly built, detached housing in suburban areas, where the restrictions on size and the interest in industrial manufacturing were less dominant. No statistics are available about the actual development of bathrooms in this period; but much suggests that bathrooms increased in size and number in detached houses, especially in the 1970s, when they began to have guest toilets and larger bathrooms with shower stalls, bathtubs, and bidets. These changes modified the regime of hygienic bathrooms, since they introduced more emphasis on convenience, but the changes were still marginal.

The *practices* involved in constituting the regime of the hygienic bathroom implied washing the body much more frequently than

Figure 2
Percentage of dwellings with WC and bath, respectively, from 1955 to 1995 in Denmark. Based on Bjørnsen *et al.* (1990: 8) and Bonke (1997: 278).



was the normal standard in the period prior to the introduction of bathrooms. However, since the standard installation for bathing in many early hygienic bathrooms was the bathtub, the process of taking a bath was quite laborious and time-consuming and was therefore a weekly rather than daily event. In the 1960s–1970s, bathing patterns began to change as it became more common to bathe or rather shower daily—either in showers mounted in the bathtub or in shower stalls. It is not easy to date this change precisely, but information from both interviews and informal discussions with families, friends, and colleagues indicate that this development took place during this period. Such changes do not involve everybody, but since the 1980s, the daily shower has been a norm for younger and middle-aged generations. A recent qualitative study on teenage cleanliness (Gram-Hanssen 2007) indicates the strength of this norm today. Hand *et al.* (2005) identify the same trend in the UK.

This change in practices was facilitated by the fact that more people gained access to bathrooms during this period, and some households made the change easier by exchanging bathtubs for showers in rooms where it was not possible to have both. But in many households, the change took place within a basically unchanged physical framework. Instead, it seemed to be mainly changes in standards and expectations that led to revised washing practices. There was less tolerance of bodily smells and stricter demands for freshly washed hair, which were coupled to shifts in societal norms about proper appearance. A change during this period that may have had an impact on norms was the rapid increase in women's employment and the related wish to be "presentable," as well as the shift in typical working conditions from those of manual labor to office work. The increase in showering may also have been connected with the spread of the washing machine, which helped make it possible to provide clean clothes at shorter intervals and thus encouraged bodily cleanliness as well.

The change in practices did not challenge the hygienic bathroom regime—more frequent washing could rather be said to intensify the regime, through the new focus on efficiency. But the increased use of the bathroom probably contributed to an increasing interest in making the room more comfortable and inviting, and this interest challenged the image of the sterile bathroom. Danish interior designers began to critique the status of the hygienic bathroom as a back room where cleanliness and duty had priority over comfort. This critique emerged in the early 1960s in guidebooks on how to arrange kitchens and bathrooms and in magazines dealing with home improvement (see e.g. Bisgaard 1987; Brøndsted 1969), and it intensified during the 1970s and 1980s. Interior designers were especially troubled by what they considered neglect of the bathroom that made the bathroom a "secondary room of the

home" (*Bo Bedre* 1970b: 12, 1976: 58). The designers believed that a too one-sided focus on clean and hygienic rooms prevailed, and that these outdated, inexpedient, dreary, dark, and sterile bathrooms therefore needed to be redesigned and turned into more comfortable rooms (*Bo Bedre* 1965: 19, 1970b: 12). Part of the critique was directed towards bathroom users, who were blamed for not giving enough attention to their bathrooms' appearance and comfort, and for treating the room as a kind of utility room—e.g. by drying clothes in the room (*Bo Bedre* 1965: 19). Instead, articles and commercials invited bathroom users to experiment with various features and designs and to engage in self-expression in the decoration of their bathrooms.

The idea of redesigning the bathroom corresponded well with the interests of the expanding bathroom industry, which developed and promoted new features and new types of products for the bathroom. For example, it became popular in the 1970s in Denmark to have colored bathroom fittings as shown in Figure 3. To supplement ordinary bathroom equipment, such products as colored tiles, small cozy carpets, and small cabinets to store bathroom accessories were promoted by a number of companies specializing in bathrooms (see e.g. *Bo Bedre* 1965: 84, 1970a: 12–23, 1976: 58–69). Emerging tendencies to decorate the room implied a modification of the bathroom's sterile whiteness, and increased considerations about convenience modified the strict sense of duty associated with the use of the room—but hygiene was still the core characteristic. The atmosphere could be "improved" by minor changes—for example, a Danish bathroom supplier, Carina, promoted their series of soap dishes and other bathroom supplies as a way of enhancing the bathroom experience (Carina 1976)—but more thorough changes in style were not on the agenda.



Figure 3
A Danish bathroom from the 1970s with colored tiles and fixtures. Photograph by the authors.

CURRENT CHANGES IN THE BATHROOM

Whereas during the 1960s to 1980s, the modifications in the hygienic bathroom took place slowly and without much notice, bathrooms have increasingly caught the media's attention since the mid-1990s, and private renovation activities have increased substantially. Danish households have focused on the installation of new kitchens for the last twenty years, but since the mid-1990s bathrooms have constituted an increasingly important share of renovation expenditures. Simultaneously, the economic conditions for renovations have improved due to income growth, introduction of new loan types, and escalation in property values (IFKA 2005). The last ten years have thus witnessed impressive activity with regard to bathroom renovations in Denmark, which encourages a study of what is going on.

Some bathroom investments consist of adding to the number of bathrooms in a dwelling. This tendency is illustrated in *Bo Bedre* and other magazines through numerous examples of individual homes where the bathroom facilities have been enhanced by utilizing a room, the cellar or the attic for installing an additional bathroom (*Bo Bedre* 2006: 70–2, 2007: 110–13; *Boligmagasinet* 2003: 50–3). Unfortunately, it is difficult to obtain reliable data on additions of toilets and bathrooms in existing dwellings, since there is a strong disincentive to report improvements that increase the property tax (Statistics Denmark customer service, pers. comm.). Available data indicates that at least 20 percent of detached and terraced houses currently have two bathrooms. An extra bathroom was added in about 10,000 more dwellings during 2006, according to Bolius, a homeowner association (Gegersen 2006). A similar trend is seen in newly built detached houses that feature at least two bathrooms, typically one connecting with the master bedroom and one in connection with the children's rooms. This is illustrated by the floor plans in advertising brochures for the two major standard house firms in Denmark (Bülow and Nielsen n.d.; Lind and Risør n.d.).

This trend is related to congestion and capacity problems in the bathroom. This trend may be due first to escalation of grooming standards, since both women and men spend more time taking care of the body in 2001 than they did in 1987, according to a Danish time use study (Bonke 2002: 67, 91). Secondly, Danish women participate in the workforce nearly as much as men, and the whole family usually leaves home in the morning around the same time. Capacity problems are particularly pronounced when the household includes teenagers. They have a lot of “front renovation” to do, as one informant puts it (see also Gram-Hanssen 2007).

Hand *et al.* (2007) identify the same trend towards multiplication of bathrooms in the UK. In itself, this trend can be seen as a direct continuation of the hygienic bathroom; however, the present changes are not only about increasing capacity, but also about changing

functions and meanings of the bathroom. In the following, the changing images of the bathroom are first highlighted as they appear in media coverage; then, results are reported from the interviews with informants who have carried out bathroom renovations.

Media Coverage

The coverage on the bathroom in different media reflects both an increasing interest in bathroom decoration and changes in bathroom images. In general, dwellings and interior decoration have been intensively covered in Denmark during the last decade, with an increasing number of TV programs and exhibitions. Our review of *Bo Bedre* also shows an increasing number of articles and advertisements on bathrooms from the 1960s to the 2000s.

The coverage of bathrooms in *Bo Bedre* suggests that bathroom renovation had been covered for a long time, but became more extensive over time. In the 1960s, bathroom coverage in *Bo Bedre* was marked by a functionalist focus, with discussions and advice about what kinds of functions to include in the bathroom, and how to arrange a practical room. During the 1970s and 1980s, the tone changed towards the more inspirational and visionary. Specifically, the magazine shifts from covering exhibitions of bathrooms to covering actual renovation projects for individual bathrooms. Also, the magazine begins to illustrate that the bathroom has no limits for opportunities of expression. During the 1990s, more stylistic and holistic ideas about creating the “right” atmosphere and making “the soul thrive” are developed (*Bo Bedre* 1996: 57; *Boligmagasinet* 2003: 36–9). An example of this is that provision of spaciousness and light is described in magazines as a strategy for providing a feeling of freedom of movement, a lighter atmosphere, and a more inviting bathroom (see e.g. *Bo Bedre* 2004: 92–4). A shift occurs from emphasis on improved aesthetics of bathroom elements in the 1960s–1980s towards a broader focus on the room’s *style and atmosphere* in the 1990s.

In the current media coverage, well-being represents a central theme, since the bathroom is portrayed as a symbol of recovery and relaxation, commercializing certain bathroom equipment and styles as a means to help relax and recover from stressful lives (see e.g. *Frederikssund Avis* 2005: 15; *Søndagsavisen* 2003: 17). Certain commercials even tend to portray the bathroom as a place that provides peace and quiet and helps recharge one’s batteries (see e.g. *Kvik* 2006; *Multiform* 2007). Also, specialized types of equipment are commercialized as providing enjoyable activities in the bathroom, such as spas, shower massage panel systems, and steam cabins (see e.g. *Alt for damerne* 1999: 120–2; *Søndagsavisen* 2004: 12; *Boligmagasinet* 2004: 50–1; *MetroXpress* 2005: 20; *Frederikssund Avis* 2005: 15; *Byggecentrum* 2005). An example of such a bathroom is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

An example of a bathroom with different kinds of well-being equipment. This is a friend's bathroom, not one of our informants'. Photograph by the authors.



The current media coverage suggests new styles, new types of equipment, and new activities to perform in the bathroom, indicating a stronger emphasis on well-being than hygiene. Although specific well-being bathrooms are portrayed in *Bo Bedre* and other magazines, these merely represent the avant-garde of bathrooms in Denmark. While many better-off households have probably renovated their bathrooms in line with the above images, the media coverage does not reflect the average Danish bathroom. For example, a trade magazine for plumbers (who typically carry out bathroom renovations) indicates that although people make extensive renovations, they seldom implement “*bathing palaces*” or “*wellness rooms*,” as indicated by the media coverage (Farbøl 2006: 30).

Through our interviews with people from among the middle-class population, we have explored how images of the well-being bathrooms are reflected in more typical bathrooms in Denmark. Ongoing renovation activities provide insight into the character of contemporary bathroom changes. Some renovation activities merely entail a physical modernization of the room—reinforcing the hygiene regime—whereas others involve more extensive shifts, where bathroom practices and images change along with the physical setting. In the following, we have selected three of the six bathroom renovation stories from our interview material to show the range in processes of change from the least to the most extensive renovations. Examples from the remaining stories are referred to whenever relevant.

Reinforcing the Hygiene Regime in a Modern Bathroom

In one case, an extensive bathroom renovation was carried out, but only to underpin the stability in prevailing practices and images, rather than signifying a regime change. This renovation was undertaken

by a young couple, Mette and Jan (in their late twenties, working as a high-school teacher and a doctor, respectively), who have just finished their studies and are expecting their first child. The idea of renovating the bathroom arose as the couple undertook a merge of their flat with the neighboring flat, since the surplus kitchen could be turned into a bathroom. Before the renovation, the couple only had a toilet in a small room and a shower cabin in the bedroom. The new bathroom has improved these conditions considerably, as the bathroom fixtures have now been installed in a proper bathroom and arranged as illustrated in Figure 5.

The renovation project was quite extensive, since it involved converting the surplus kitchen into a new bathroom. Even though the new bathroom (4 m²) provided space for more facilities and a more imaginative design, the couple chose a minimalist, hygiene-inspired arrangement. As the couple states, they prioritized a room that is “rather nice, but first of all functional” (all quotations are translated by the authors). This means that the couple chose fixtures and materials in line with the hygiene regime: white and gray tiles, visible plumbing, and sparse fixtures in the form of a sink and a shower (keeping the toilet in an adjoining room). The only elements of well-being expressed by the couple relate to the value they place on the comfort of space and light provided by the new bathroom. They have put some effort into the arrangement of



Figure 5

The bathroom of Mette and Jan repeats the core features of the hygienic bathroom. Photograph by the authors.

the shower cabin, making it sufficiently large to enable freedom of movement and using glass bricks to enhance the natural daylight. The inspiration for this shower cabin derives from magazines and friends' bathrooms. This idea of spaciousness and light is also strong among other informants, who express the desire for a spacious shower cabin and natural daylight in the bathroom. The couple did not change their practices or perceptions of the bathroom radically. This bathroom is an example of the manifestation of the hygiene regime in a modern bathroom, since existing hygiene rationales were reinforced rather than changed.

Enhancing the Pleasures and Hominess of the Bathroom

In the second case, the renovation involved a refurbishment of an existing bathroom. The physical changes of the renovation were accompanied by changes in the way of showering and the bathroom's general image, and the discovery of pleasures associated with the room.

The renovation was carried out by a young woman, Katrine (aged 33 and employed as a cleaning supervisor), after she had moved to a new flat together with her 8-year old son, following a divorce. Katrine had never taken much interest in her bathrooms, having grown up in small flats with very small and functional bathrooms, at best. In her previous flat, her bathroom consisted of a small room with a toilet and a sink, providing only enough space to sit on the toilet while showering. Since the bathroom in her new flat was the original one from the 1930s, with terrazzo floor, toilet with cistern, a large sink and no shower or bath, she was motivated to renovate it. She found this bathroom too distasteful; it was worn-out, dirty, and inconvenient. She renovated the bathroom from top to toe, laying new tiles on the floor and walls, and installing new bathroom equipment and accessories. As illustrated in Figure 6, the renovated bathroom is not eye-catching in any way, since it merely provides for the basic functions, with a toilet, sink, showering area, and washing machine; however, Katrine expresses her satisfaction with having renovated the bathroom:

And I am happy that I chose to make a whole new bathroom. Because now it is attractive, and pleasant. It's just like I wanted it. I have influenced it. Of course, after three weeks, you see some magazine and say, "Oh no, just see this bathroom!" It's always like that. Also when you buy something so simple as a pair of new stockings. You can always see something that's nicer.

One minor change in the bathroom setting furthered a tremendous change in Katrine's showering practices: a demarcated showering area, a feature that was possible, because the bathroom provided enough space (being 4 m²) and thus a more straightforward



Figure 6

The bathroom of Katrine, made homier by visibly placing everyday objects in the room. Photograph by the authors.

and convenient way of showering. She no longer has to remove all the accessories in the room before showering, as in her previous bathroom, since the water is now retained within the showering area. Katrine describes how she has now begun to extend the duration of her showers, using showering as an occasion to pamper herself, e.g. by enjoying taking care of her body. The daily shower has become more than simply cleaning her body; she describes it as a means to dissolve the time restrictions that she encounters as a single parent. This also connects to her new situation as a single mom, as she has less time and is tied more to the flat since the divorce. To her, showering has become an occasion for her to enjoy a quiet and private moment during a hectic day:

Katrine: I always take my bath when he [her son] has gone to bed. Because then I have time. So there's not... So then, there's peace and quiet, and if I want, I can take 10 minutes, and if I want to take a half-hour, I can do that. Magnus' (her son) and my time, when we're at home are 100 percent "Magnus-time." It's all about him, right [...]

Interviewer: What about this daily shower in the evening, what does it mean to you?

Katrine: I just think it's nice. It's so relaxing. "Aaaaahhh." Then you relax. And you, "aaahhh," I think it gives such tranquility, when one has been in the shower. I think one gets so "ppff" (she puffs out), not that one gets tired, but one just relaxes, gets some tranquility into the body [...]

This illustrates how the idea of grooming the body has been transformed from a necessary obligation to an enjoyable activity, turning the daily shower into an inviting and exquisite experience. Several of the other informants also express this idea of the pleasure of grooming. This suggests that these "backstage" activities (in the words of Goffman 1959) are not merely viewed as cleaning duties, but that people may also associate them with pleasure and self-pampering. Not only does Katrine extend the duration of her shower; her son also spends time in the shower playing (using a lot of time and water).

Another important transformation in Katrine's bathroom is the development of new images regarding the bathroom as a whole. Rather than focusing on keeping a sterile bathroom design in keeping with its purpose of cleaning the body, she begins to compare her bathroom with other rooms in the home, attempting to integrate the bathroom into the home by making it cozier:

Some people might think this is a mess—a basket with stuff for the washing machine there and a basket with all those creams, and then a flower. How smart is that? But it's just to make it look homey, and it's a place that gets used—just because it's a toilet, there can still be a flower. And it can be cozy and homey. Of course, it also has to be clean. But not sterile. This is a place where the family spends a lot of time [...]. It's part of the home, too, so of course there also has to be something.

To her, the bathroom has become a "tempting setting," connecting an element of luxury and enjoyment to her daily shower, and providing a certain atmosphere, comparable to those of a living room. Other informants talk in similar terms about having a more "inviting" bathroom, using terms like "nice," "cozy," and "luxurious." Providing a homier atmosphere in the room represents a way to bring the bathroom closer to other rooms in the home, toning down the distinctive symbolism of the hygienic bathroom. Such efforts to harmonize the bathroom's style with the rest of the home are closely linked to the idea of the bathroom as a family room, an idea not only expressed by Katrine, but also by Henrik, a family father (aged 40 and employed as a lawyer):

It [the bathroom] is a place where there is also room for the whole family, and that is very important for us, for me anyway. It is nice that we can be together there. And not only in the kitchen or living room.

Henrik's family illustrates well how the bathroom becomes transformed into a family room during certain rush hours of the day in a busy family. Both Katrine and Henrik use the morning rituals as an opportunity for the family to be together during a stressful day with separate activities. Comparing the bathroom with the living room or kitchen thus represents a means of coping with the hectic pace of daily life, but it requires a certain amount of space and in some cases special equipment such as double sinks in order for the family to use the room simultaneously. The idea of the bathroom as a family room can be interpreted as part of the trend towards increasing pace and efficiency in the actions and experiences of everyday life. In such cases, people try to do and experience more within a given period of time by doing more things simultaneously (Rosa 2003).

Seeking Recreation in the Bathroom

As the next case illustrates, some people purposely seek new ways of using the bathroom. Renovation represents a goal-oriented process of materializing specific images of the bathroom and developing new practices in the room. In this last case, an extensive bathroom renovation was carried out with the specific aim of establishing a new practical and recreational bathroom in the home.

The renovation was led mainly by Betina (aged 34 and employed as an animation artist), assisted by her husband. The couple had been accustomed to rather unsophisticated bathroom conditions during their time together, but the addition of a second child to the family represented an occasion to improve the existing bathroom conditions. Their former bathroom consisted of a small room with only a toilet, a sink, and a hand shower, and they describe it as being "primitive and miserable," especially due to the coldness of the room, because it was not insulated. The renovation project involved an expansion of the small house, restoring an unused wing of the house, establishing a new entrance and a large bathroom (13 m²). After renovation, the room was arranged with toilet, sink, shower cabin, bathtub, a practical working area with changing table, washing machine, and tumble dryer, as depicted in Figure 7. The extensive priority given to the new bathroom even surprised Betina:

So when we do it [renovate the bathroom], we go all the way. We give priority to a big bathroom in relation to ... I mean, it is really big in relation to how much room we have otherwise. Maybe it's a bit irrational to make it so big, because we did

Figure 7

The bathroom of Betina and her husband, with the bathtub on legs she wished for. Photograph by the authors.



need a guest room, and we could easily have made it half as big. That was the original idea, and then we could have used the other half for a guest room. But we felt that now that we had decided to make a bathroom, why not give it priority [...] In that way, it is very luxurious in relation to the rest, and that's really a great feeling.

In this renovation project, Betina attempted to act out the vision of the bathroom as a sanctuary for her occasional baths. Taking a relaxing bath is something that Betina has always enjoyed, sometimes borrowing her parents' bathtub, since her former bathrooms did not facilitate this practice. She describes this kind of bathing hour as a moment of meditation:

[Taking an evening bath] is something luxurious. You can make it [...] much cozier by shutting off the light and lighting a candle and pouring a nice cup of something, and putting something special in the bath water, and it's like a little meditation time out there [...] But I have also used it with Bente [her daughter] with only candlelight out there, and it's so really intimate and cozy like that.

Although the bathtub is only occasionally used for this type of relaxation, this idea of self-pampering and well-being has dominated the entire renovation project. Betina has strived to establish the right setting and atmosphere for taking a relaxing bath, drawing parallels to the atmosphere of Roman baths that she has visited. Originally, Betina envisioned lying in a bathtub, while looking out

the windows, out on the garden, since she saw this image of a bathroom in a magazine. However, this idea of opening up the bathroom towards the garden proved to be impossible to carry out for practical reasons. Instead, the idea of a romantic atmosphere has been attained through small means, like carefully selecting the “right” claw-footed bathtub and accessories for the room, lighting candles, etc., in an otherwise ordinary bathroom setting.

The new bathroom is mainly used as an efficient daily working and preparation space with room for showering, changing the small ones, and laundering. Although the more recreational use of the bathroom for taking a relaxing bath is only an occasional event, Betina tends to generally associate the bathroom with the image of a sanctuary. She couples the notion of relaxation to the idea of well-being and having a nice time alone or together with her daughter. Other informants relate relaxation to the healthful effect of physically relaxing the body by loosening sore muscles through massage with warm water. For other informants (especially males), the toilet is also pointed out as an obvious place for finding some peace and quiet—a private moment to enjoy reading or solving crossword puzzles. This idea of withdrawing from the busy life and quick pace, which many people experience on the toilet is in line with the idea of the bathroom as a private place, where a locked door protects privacy (Gastelaars 1996: 493–4). Seen in this light, the bathroom becomes a place in which to withdraw, a sanctuary, where you can lock others out for a moment.

IS A NEW BATHROOM REGIME EMERGING?

The current changes in the bathroom clearly challenge the regime of the hygienic bathroom, but it is less obvious whether a new regime is emerging. Each of the elements constituting the regime of the hygienic bathroom is subject to change, but how radical can the changes be considered to be, and can the changes be said to “fit together,” pointing towards a new, relatively coherent whole? In the following, we consider first the changes in each of the elements, and then discuss whether a new regime may be emerging.

The Physical Framework

The hygienic bathroom was small, white, cold, sparsely equipped—and a shared facility for several household members. The majority of households still have only one bathroom, but the trend towards multiplying the number of bathrooms has been visible for decades and seems to have intensified over time. The average size of households has decreased (2.16 persons per household in 2006), and at the same time, fewer people share facilities with others. Regarding bathroom size, the trend is clearly to go for bigger rooms, not only in new buildings but also by using more space for the bathroom in existing buildings. In general, physical

transformations are characterized by the pursuit of spaciousness and light, even when it is not possible in a literal sense, but has to be “constructed” by indirect means such as glass bricks. The whiteness of the hygiene bathroom has been replaced by color and decoration, and a comfortable temperature is necessary for the room to be considered to have a reasonable standard. When it is not possible to expand the room, renovations often involve the replacement of the sitz bath with a shower, giving priority to the practical considerations related to the daily shower. In the expanded bathrooms, the bathtub returns as a supplement to the shower stall, and the market for wellness equipment such as spas, shower massage panel systems, and steam cabinets has expanded (see e.g. <http://www.westerbergs.com>). Since most recreational equipment requires a spacious bathroom, it is probably acquired mainly by high-income groups, but some models are offered for installation in small rooms. Also, fitness equipment as well as electronic entertainment appliances find their way to the bathroom. In dwellings with no space for a utility room, a washing machine can be placed in the bathroom.

Practices

The main practices of the hygienic bathroom were related to the use of the toilet and the duty-oriented cleaning practices. These are still core practices in the bathroom, but the preparation rituals related to increasing standards of appearance take up more time, and some people perceive the more elaborate processes involved in taking care of the body as a treat. Of course, the weekly bath could also be experienced as enjoyable in the days of the hygienic bathroom, but the pleasure tended to be justified by duty. Now a quick shower can be a duty, while a bath or long shower are rather motivated by pleasure—a recreational use of the bathroom where we can relax and recharge our batteries. The dominant duty-oriented practices of the hygienic bathroom were carried out alone, in privacy. The bathroom is still used as a place for withdrawal, but some families also use the opportunity for being together in the bathroom. Socializing can relate to the daily rituals as well as to the entertaining and relaxing well-being activities, using the bathtub or equipment constructed for recreation. Finally, the bathroom is sometimes used for chores related to laundry in households with no utility room.

Images

The images and meanings associated with the hygienic bathroom and the practices taking place in this room can be summed up as cleanliness, duty, and back-stage status, which are emphasized by the aesthetics of hygienic whiteness and coolness. Hygiene is still important in the bathroom, but new layers of meaning have

been developed, and the rationale of hygiene no longer has the dominant framing capability. The current media coverage suggests quite different images in connection with the modern bathroom. First of all, the bathroom is represented as a place for well-being: it is a warm and convenient place for enjoying body treatments, for pleasurable and relaxing activities, for pampering and self-indulgence. It is a place where the current demands regarding appearances can be met in a both practical and enjoyable way. In addition, the room can be used for recreational purposes and be pictured as a pure sanctuary. Images of retreat coexist with images of socializing, particularly in relation to the promotion of wellness equipment. Aesthetically, the impersonal image of hygiene has been replaced by images of stylishness and coziness. The room is personalized and increasingly reflects different tastes and design choices. Like the rest of the home, the bathroom has become what Gullestad (1992) calls an expressive manifestation of ever more subtle and complex messages. In short, the bathroom has developed into a front-stage room.

A New Regime?

Changes in each of the constituents of the hygienic bathroom provide good reasons to argue that the regime of the hygienic bathroom has been destabilized. Surely, some households still stick to the old regime, and it even survives some of the renovation projects, but the dominant trends undermine the regime. On the basis of the media coverage and by making an appropriate selection among observations, it is not difficult to construct a candidate for a new emerging bathroom regime: the well-being bathroom. The well-being bathroom would be large, comfortable, personalized, and furnished with a spa or other kinds of recreational equipment, and it would be used for both body care and recreation. In a family dwelling, a well-being room could be combined with smaller bathrooms with more modest facilities. Such a vision is driven by commercial interests, and the bathroom is increasingly turned into a consumption area on a similar footing with other rooms in the house. As the recent wave of renovations demonstrates, consumers are responsive to the ideas and apply inspiration from commercials, magazines, and television programs. People do not only update their bathroom when it is worn out; they also tend to customize and adapt the room according to change of life phases or when new trends emerge.

Few people, however, realize fully-fledged well-being bathrooms in practice. Some do not have the economic possibilities, and some need to find a practical setting for a washing machine or have other practical considerations to take into account. Probably, economic recession will slow down the process in the next few years, but the setback could be followed by a new take-off, depending on the strength of the well-being rationale. It is worth noting that some

dissociate themselves from the well-being vision and just modify the old regime when they renovate their bathrooms. In addition, the well-being rationale is not embraced by a broad social coalition as the hygiene rationale was: when the hygienic bathroom came into being, the public discourse on hygiene and the coalition of health personnel, city planners, and housewives' leagues all promoted a dominant rationale; this does not have a parallel today. Considering how long it took to implement the hygienic bathroom, other rationales may develop and challenge the implementation of the well-being bathroom before it really gets established. For instance, environmental considerations may cross the diffusion of a well-being regime (Quitzeau and Røpke 2008). The bathroom will be an interesting arena to follow in the years to come.

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